is now proposed to achieve a South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) by the year 2001. The Bangkok Agreement to which India is a signatory, seeks to promote economic development through a continuous process of trade expansion among the developing member countries of ESCAP. BIST-EC (Bangladesh, India, Srilanka, Thailand-Economic Cooperation) is a new initiative launched in June 1997 which aims at close economic cooperation between these countries by mutual trade concessions and joint projects in this region.

**FOREX Reserve**

2865. SHRI DATTA MEGHE: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether the position of foreign exchange (FOREX) reserve at present is statisfactory;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the steps being taken by the Government for increasing the FOREX reserve?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI SATPAL MAHARAJ): (a to (c) India's foreign exchange reserves including gold and SDRs, amounted to US $ 29.69 billion on July 25, 1997. The level of foreign exchange reserves, which is equivalent to over 8 months of imports, is considered satisfactory. The on-going wide ranging programme of macro-economic and structural reforms is expected to produce results that will sustian the foreign exchange reserves at a comfortable level.

**Non-Payment of Loans to SCs**

2866. DR. BALIRAM: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether complaints have been received from Scheduled Castes people against Simbhaoli Branch of State Bank of India, District Ghaziabad (U.P.) regarding non-payment of loan granted by Government under various welfare schemes for these people;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether the loanees have received notices from the concerned departments for repayment of the loan which was actually not paid to them by the bank;

(d) if so, the reasons therefor; and

(e) the steps taken or proposed to be taken by the Government in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI SATPAL MAHARAJ): (a) to (e) The information is being collected and will be laid on the Table of the House to the extent available.

**Transport Subsidy**

2867. SHRI KESHAB MAHANTA:

SHRI SOMJIBHAI DAMOR:

Will the Minister of INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) the details of Transport subsidy claimed and released to North-Eastern States during each of the last three years, as on June 30, 1997, State-wise, Industry-wise;

(b) the reasons for delay in releasing the subsidy; and

(c) the steps being taken by the Government to remedy the situation?

THE MINISTER OF INDUSTRY (SHRI MURASOLI MARAN): (a) Under the Transport Subsidy Scheme, the subsidy claims are first scrutinised by the State Level Committee and disbursement made to eligible units by the State Governments. Reimbursement thereof is claimed subsequently by the State Governments from the Central Government. The details of transport subsidy released to the State in the North-Eastern region during the last three years and during 1997-98 (upto 30th June, 1997) are given in the attached statement. The industries covered are plywood industry, flour milling, steel fabrication, oil and rice milling etc.

(b) and (c) Subsidy in respect of claims which are found to be in order is released to the State Governments immediately. However, wherever certain deficiencies are noticed, State Governments are requested to rectify the same and the subsidy in such cases is released soon after receipt of requisite details/clarifications.

**Statement**

*Statement showing year-wise releases made by the Central Government under the Transport Subsidy Scheme.*

(Rupees in lakhs)

| Name of the State | 1994-95 | 1995-96 | 1996-97 | 1997-98 upto 30.06.1997 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Assam | 2217.90 | 3861.10 | 2061.89 | 1667.50 |
| Manipur | 128.70 | — | — | — |